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Edward Eberett in the Ministry of Reconciliation.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

South Congregational Church,

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S E R M O N .

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Ch. v. : 18.

I AM to illustrate this ministry of reconciliation by some study of the character of the great man whom God has just now called away.

I do not hesitate, as you know, my friends, to bring to this place even my own personal sorrows. For we are here in a home, and we meet here as friend with friend. But it is not from personal grief that I am to speak to-day. I am to speak to you of the life of one whose loss you also mourn,—for whom this city, this state, and the whole land is mourning. We will not, in our ceremonies of homage for his memory, let that life pass by without finding some lesson in it, if we can.

At the end of the threescore years and ten, before he had experienced that sorrow which belongs to the fourscore years, when fourscore years do come, he “ceased from his labors.” His death was in the midst of every circumstance which poet or prophet ask for, to which of old they gave the name of Euthanasy, or, a happy death. It was sudden, but not unprepared for. All life has been making his preparation. He is in the

midst of honors as of success ; he has the consciousness, at the very last, of duty well done, and that the last effort of his life had been made in the relief of his suffering brethren. He is at home, surrounded by every tenderness, and there, very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, the spirit which has so fulfilled its part here shakes off the body which serves it no longer, and, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, it is changed. It is clothed upon with the spiritual body, and, in the new life, assumes the new senses and experiences of the new Home.

My friends, as I looked that morning on that still face, and then as I passed from that house, so desolate, to the church where he took his first vows in the service of God and the world, — as I sat and stood in that pulpit, where he spoke his first word in the work to which his life was given, it was impossible to look upon the end of that life, and to look back upon its beginning, without seeing how its whole work had been one work, — without feeling the complete and steady consistency which had animated so many diverse undertakings ; without feeling that he had been true to this ministry of reconciliation ; to the support of which, even before boyhood was over, he pledged his life and took his ordination vows.

In such words as I could command, I spoke then to that congregation of his faithfulness, his life through, to that ministry. I saw that I spoke to those who had heard his first words of public speech, who remembered the eloquence of his youth as it gave promise, so well fulfilled, of the riper eloquence of his manhood and age. And to them I said, that though he left the pulpit so

soon, he did not leave the ministry of Christ. To that ministry he was true from his boyhood to the moment of his death, — in spheres of work so much larger than any single pulpit can control he was true to it, — in this continent, and in the other he was true to it, — in private life and in public. And in every effort of a ministry, whose field, as it proved, became so wide and so diversified, it was, in his life, always a ministry of reconciliation.

I. You will find this is true, my friends, in the work which he considered the central work of his life, — in the work which he did for the education of the people. I have not failed to observe in this last week, that men have been remembering him as a scholar, as a statesman, as an orator, while they praised him as a good citizen, as a patriot. But if you had asked him, the last day of his life, what was the essential or central wish and thought of his life, and what work he had most wished to succeed in, he would not have named statesmanship, oratory or learning. He would have named the education of the people. To this work he gave himself before he left college, when he undertook the duty of a district school teacher, — teaching pupils half of whom were older than himself. He held to it to the last hour of his life, when the only public office which he retained was his charge as a trustee of the Public Library, an institution which in its very birth he cherished, and for which he worked and studied that it might become what it is, the fit completion of your system of education. He meant that it should fulfil and

complete the true Catholic purpose of a Christian city, and give to the beggar the same opportunity for mental culture, — as has any prince of the land. From that beginning to this end, the idea of education has been central and essential, in his literary works, in his public addresses, — and you find it as well in his statesmanship and in his discharge of executive duties. In his orations he is never satisfied until he has instructed the audience in the facts involved, and this in no general way, but in a curious, almost recondite review of minute incidents connected with them. This habit sprang from his determination not to let those concourses of people separate till they had learned something, and had been imbued with the passion, or the determination to learn much more. So his service as governor of this state was distinguished especially by the measures which were then inaugurated and set into successful operation for the development, and I may say, the re-establishment of our whole system of common schools. His interest in the University all men knew. It was an interest not in the least confined to an interest in any class of college-bred men, or to any special course of college studies, but an interest in which he determined to make the University promote and enlarge the common education of all. In this especial interest the very last hours of his life were spent, and his last literary effort was devoted to the course of lectures on International Law which in the next college term he expected to deliver at Cambridge.

Now all this interest in education springs directly from his sense of the equal rights of all men, — from

his determination that all men shall be closer united with each other; that all chasms between class and class in society shall be so bridged over, that the lines of promotion shall be kept steadily open. That is to say, it is work done in the ministry of reconciliation:—that all men may be one, in the very wish and promise of the Saviour's prayer. "As thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that in us they may also be one." There shall not be the chasm of ignorance, unavoidable and fore-ordained, to keep them longer sundered.

II. You will find the same desire for reconciliation in his work as a public officer in political life. I said, just now, that his last studies were given to that great system of Public Law, which is itself the child of the Christian religion, and which, in the present state of Christendom, constitutes the only tie which unites nations together. To the diligent and conscientious use of this system, in securing the harmonious relation of states, some of the most distinguished work of his life was given, since, on entering Congress in his early life, he was appointed immediately a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. When he returned to Congress as a Senator, he returned to a similar position in the Foreign Affairs Committee of that day. But I do not care to speak now of his part in mediating between nations, either in these positions, or when he was abroad, or when, as Secretary of State, he had the management of all our foreign relations. He asserted the ministry of reconciliation as constantly and as carefully in his work in our own contentions here at home. And here, too, I do not satisfy myself

with speaking of the candor and courtesy in which he always dealt with political opponents. He was sure of their respect, even when he forfeited that of his political friends. And I do not mean to speak of manner simply. I mean that he was willing to sacrifice anything that was personal ; he was willing to sacrifice even his own honorable fame and the laurels which he had fairly won and fairly wore, if, by the sacrifice, he could more closely unite men or sections of the country which were in contention with each other. When the history of his life shall be fairly written, it will appear that, in his efforts in this direction, which he made before this war came on, his every thought and wish and prayer were in the desire to sustain and establish the equal rights of men, and to work out, not a temporary truce, but a step towards lasting reconciliation. In the intimate personal relations which he had with leading men through all the south, and in his personal correspondence with them, he had means of influence such as no other man in this section of the country enjoyed. And I am eager to say here and now, what I suppose no man but himself had a right to say the day before he died, that when that correspondence is laid open, when the influence which he tried to exert is fairly judged and understood, it will be acknowledged that this country had then no truer friend, and none who had a more consistent policy. It will be seen that in that policy he used his influence, I do not say for external union merely, but for the freedom of all men as well, with a view to that more thorough reconciliation which is based on the eternal rights of man. He saw, as we saw, and as we see to-day,

that in the union of these states is bound up all hope of the liberty of the slave. He saw what we did not see then, but what we do see now, that these states at that hour were on the very edge of civil war. And he saw what we did not see, but what we shall see, that there existed not only on our side of the line, but on the southern side of it as well, influences which could be relied upon for the reconciliation of the whole land on a basis which should respect and acknowledge the rights of all men. Seeing this, or supposing that he saw it, he was willing to sacrifice everything that a man could sacrifice in his ministry of reconciliation. In the discharge of that duty, under the necessities of the hour, it became necessary that he should be suspected, that he should be abused, that the laurels of old victories should be torn from him, unless by personal explanations he threw away the prospect of peace for the country and security for the rights of *all* her people, for which he was working. In that necessity he was true to his vow of ordination. He was as willing to give up men's admiration as this week he has shown himself willing to give up his life, so that by the one sacrifice or the other, men might be brought closer together. He could have regained that regard and confidence by a word, but he would not speak that word, while there was any hope that it was possible to combine, for the real union of this land, the efforts, and convictions of all its people.

III. In this community there is no need that I should speak of the more simple personal kindnesses, by which, in his daily life, he carried out the ministry

of reconciliation. Every one of you, almost, has your own special anecdote, by which to illustrate that singular gentleness or tenderness which welcomed all who came to him in any need. His money, his counsel, his wonderful memory, and, what was worth so much more to all of us, his time, were freely given every hour, to any one who could show that single claim. What stories that house, which seems so lonely now, has been hearing through all this week, of this tenderness and daily charity, kept hid so carefully before ! It is a boy left without a father, who comes from a distant home, to say here was his best friend ; it is some exile here, who needed his command of language, that she might fitly explain to him the poverty, he was to assuage. Every hour has been hearing a new story of want, to which he has ministered, and of personal loss, which is not satisfied with the public expression of a public calamity. A thousand persons have said before now, each that in Mr. Everett he has lost his best friend. There comes at the end of such a life, of which every day had some such record of kindness to others, this crowning act of Monday—which we know now was so fatal to us,—in which he gave his life away for those who were in need. Through this winter, he had absolutely declined the proposals, which were made to him, literally every hour, to speak in public. He had secluded himself from all such engagements, that he might prepare his lectures on Public Law for the University. His friends understood that no call for his voice or public counsel must be made on him. But then came this cry for bread from Savannah,—

the first glimpse of the rainbow on the cloud of the last four years,—and that cry spoke to him, as it always spoke to him. To that appeal it was not for him to say, No! You know how he answered it. True to the promise he made when he began his Christian ministry, he closed that public ministry in the temple sacred to your liberties. He preached to you then and there a sermon,—and such a sermon!—on the text which he announced himself: “If thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink.” In the work of the Christian ministry his life began, in that work it has passed on, in that work it has come to an end.

IV. But all that I have said would be nothing if he of whom it is said were not a courageous man. It is nothing for a man to believe in the brotherhood of man,—it is nothing for him to consecrate his life to the ministry of reconciliation; it is nothing to feel tenderly and lovingly to all men around him, if he do not dare address himself to the work required in such sentiments, if he do not put his own shoulders to the wheel and his own hand to the plough. Not enough to “know what’s right,” unless, as the hymn says, one is willing to practise what he knows. I am eager to say, therefore, that Mr. Everett seems to me a man of courage,—and I say this the more eagerly because I have heard this doubted,—and I do not believe that, by ill-informed observers, his character here was rightly conceived. I have heard men say he was timid. In any philosophical use of language, this word does not apply to him. Conscientious he was, in the finest fibre of his

life, — in its coarsest fibre as well. I do not believe the man lives who remembers word or work of his in which the trace of conscience could not be seen, working with that amazing rapidity which marked all the operations of his mind or heart. But he was not what is called morbidly conscientious. In that sense he was not timid. It is true that he was *shy*. In his personal relations with man, woman, and child, there was always a trace of diffidence, — of real self-distrust when he met a stranger. One who knew him could see it in the movement of his hand, or in the glance of his eye. I do not think he ever overcame it. I believe he felt it as much the last day of his life as he did the day he entered Harvard College as a freshman. And people who did not know him well, judged him from this shyness. But it was a matter merely personal. It affected his relations with people he saw and spoke to. But it did not affect his relations to society, to the state, to history, and to the future. And I think you will find that people who knew him well, thought that in those relations his course was rather apt to be bold and unexpected than to be that of familiar following of precedents. I think they will say, that from natural temper, in such relations, he was a courageous man. His State papers are a fair illustration of this, — too few they are, because he was so little of his life in executive station. You will find in those papers that he was disposed, of temperament, to strike out new and bold plans of policy. When he was in England, for instance, he recommended to our government a policy in the search and impressment questions so bold that they did not dare to follow it. I do not doubt the

government has often enough regretted that they did not. So, when he was in the Department of State, his answer to the proposals of the three nations in regard to Cuba announced a policy new to every man in America, in the form in which he stated it, but which, as he stated it, commanded the assent of every thoughtful man in America from that day to ours. And, certainly, the celebrated letter to Baron Hülsemann, which he drew as Mr. Webster's confidential friend,—in our discussion with Austria as to the citizenship of German exiles, is a document as remarkable for the boldness of the policy it indicates as any document in our history.

It is true that he was moderate in expression. From his boyhood he studied moderation. He says, in his memoirs, that he learned the methods of moderate expression from Benjamin Franklin. Because he was a minister of reconciliation, he never would overstate, as he never would understate, the position or the sentiment of an antagonist. The business of his life was to reconcile antagonisms. He could not be driven therefore into exaggerated language; and, for this, he would be censured. I remember how the most courteous and gentle of my friends, now no longer living, told me why New England was dissatisfied with Mr. Everett's career as a senator. "New England did not send him there to argue, she did not send him there to persuade," said my friend; "she sent him to *swear* at these southern leaders," and I remember that my gentle friend went so far as to specify the oath Mr. Everett should have used, the only time when I ever heard an oath sully his conversation. I have no doubt that that was what New England wanted,

but it was just what New England could not have. If that was what she wanted she had sent the wrong man. He had not gone there to call down God's vengeance even on the worst of men. From the beginning of his life he had attempted this ministry of reconciliation, and whoever he dealt with, the weakest or the wickedest, still he recognized them also as his Father's children, and worked as he prayed, that they also, with all men, might be one.

He was conscientious. He was shy. He was moderate. But he was not timid. Shyness is not timidity. Moderation is not timidity. Conscience is not timidity. The oldest definition of courage makes it the mean between rashness and cowardice. And in all the essential crises of his life, if I understand it, he showed himself a brave man. It is my duty to say this here and now, that young men may understand what sort of man it is who becomes a leader of society, a counsellor of states, an authority in letters. Men and associations and cabinets do not set themselves in order to listen to a coward's counsels. When you look upon the man who becomes the foremost citizen, you know, — because you find him in that position, — you may be certain that he is a brave man.

Of such a life, the lesson, as God teaches it, is simple indeed. As we gather here, we are not remembering the cadences of his eloquence; it is not his wonderful command of language, it is not his matchless memory, it is not the comprehensiveness of his view, which illustrated from so wide experience each subject which came before him, it is none of these things that we care for, nay, that we remember. It is the

pledge of his life to God in Christ, it is the unselfishness, the tenderness, the love, the courage, and, at last, the self-sacrifice, by which he carries out that pledge at the end. You, young men, must not look into his history as if there were art of eloquence, or any intellectual methods of conviction, or any learning of schools or of books, by which you could rival that renown. Like everything which men prize, it is too great and too beautiful to be made an exclusive property, or locked up for one life, or two, or three.

Oh! my friends, how often this lesson is repeated to us, as we see the empty places of the strong men of this land, its counsellors and statesmen, but see their forms no more, that it is not their intellectual greatness; it is not their triumphs, whether of statesmanship or learning, for which we prize them, but the truth, the honor, the love, which might be, which ought to be, alike in all. As we think on him whom we have lost, we know that we shall never hear again such words; we know that no man will imitate those wonders either of oratory or of learning. But it is not that which we are grieving for. And that which we do grieve for, that which made him what he was and what he is, is no peculiar or separate treasure. This constancy, this tenderness, this unselfishness, it may be yours as it was his, as glorious in you as in him. The most ignorant beggar may lay claim to it, the child of least experience may begin with it, because we are all children together of the God who asks for such graces, and who gives them. It is to him we turn in our grief, asking him for the Faith, the Hope, and the Love which abide and continue forever.